

LUTHERAN
WOMAN
TODAY

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GTULIBRARY

The Burning Bush

For Growth in Faith and Mission

December special

Thank you for the beautiful December cover—"Joy" for Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany.

I enjoy the "Devotions on the Gifts of Advent," and we are using some for our Advent service. The "Invitation to Joy" and "I Sang with the Angels" were special, and, of course, the Bible study.

*Melba Anderson
Dassel, Minnesota*

Oh, the depth of truth!

God is listening and hearing many prayers for a spiritual renewal in the church. This can take place by God's mercy and grace if we commit ourselves and heed the message in "Taking the Self Out of Righteousness" [November LWT]. Oh, the depth of truth revealed in the last paragraph!

*Myrtle MacIver
St. Cloud, Minnesota*

Good news...bad news

"The Coming of the Millennium: Good News for the Whole Human Race," by Darrell J. Fasching [November LWT] prompted considerable comment. A majority of respondents took issue with the author. Here is a sampling—ED.

I was appalled by the article. I am at a loss to understand how a Lutheran magazine would print such a derogatory, untrue article. A born-again Christian could, and would, *never, never* say the Bible teaches every human being will go to heaven. I am wondering what the Lutheran Church is coming to.

*Esther DeHaan
Sioux City, Iowa*

We don't need any more articles like this. [The author is] just not up to the standard of the other articles you carry. His way of thinking is actually dangerous to "new" or "unsteady" Christians.

*Lillian M. Colberg
Milbank, South Dakota*

I am very puzzled as to the reason for this article. I also have never agreed with Hal Lindsey's interpretation of Revelation, but the article appears to be in direct contrast to the November Bible study, "The Righteous Judge."

It also seems to me to be in opposition to what I have understood about salvation being a free gift to all who accept Christ as their Savior. [Fasching says:] "Not only believers but all the pagan nations

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of the earth enter into the New Jerusalem" (see Revelation 21:24-27); and "The kingdom of God is not just for Christians, and our God is Savior of all people."

My understanding is that God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:3-4). If this interpretation is wrong, I wonder why we support Christian churches and Christian missionaries. Perhaps this article was included to force us to ponder over what our beliefs really are!

*Maxine Thompson
Sun City West, Arizona*

For a number of our Bethesda Women of the ELCA, "Good News for the Whole Human Race" was not "good news." It was disturbing!

Certainly there is hope for *all*, and we need to become the incarnation of God's hospitality, bringing peace to the earth, but [the author] seems to imply that it makes no difference what one believes for *all* will be saved... "enter into the New Jerusalem." Is this his approach when he is teaching young people!? We are concerned!

On the other hand, we are most grateful to God for many other articles in LWT and especially for the stimulating Bible study "Jesus: The Messiah Among Us."

*Mildred Skugrud, et al.
Moorhead, Minnesota*

Yes, there's "Good News for the Whole Human Race." But if we take the Bible as a whole, there's bad news, too (such as Mark 16:16; John 12:48-49; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12).

A human is free (love cannot be coerced) and can reject God's gift of love. If God should decide in the future not to condemn any who

reject his love, maybe their relationship to him could be as a puppet rather than a close child.

Let's leave it to the judge to reconcile Jesus' paradoxical statements.

*Hope Blackman
Houston, Texas*

I understand your disclaimer that opinions expressed in this magazine may not be those of Women of the ELCA, but this article could cause great confusion and harm. In our society today we are constantly bombarded by Satan's lie that all roads lead to heaven and there is no judgment or hell.

*Sylvia Kohler
Sacramento, California*

We applaud the article. It seems biblical scholars have long argued about who will get into heaven and who won't. This seems the least significant part of a personal religion.

The longer we live, the more we ask, "What is truth?" as did Pilate and the people on Bill Moyer's TV series *Genesis: A Living Conversation*. We cling to the purity of the messenger, Jesus, while not trying to understand the Bible's every word. We believe the good news is about freeing faith, about all-embracing inclusion rather than exclusion, such as the exclusion of "nonbelievers."

*Robert and Jayne Bell
Potosi, Missouri*

Having just preached on the theme of preparation, I thank you for the good word of Darrell Fasching. It brought me great joy. I shall use it as a resource in the months and years ahead as we approach the end of the

(continued on p. 2)

◆◆ Letters

(continued from p. 1)

millennium. Another text came to mind, Philippians 2:9-11: "Therefore God...gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend...and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord."

I read this in the light of Fasching's perspective that this is not a test, but will be a privilege for all. As people of faith we are indeed the human incarnation of God's divine incarnation, and we are to "extend the hospitality of God's crucified love to the whole human race."

*Barbara Birkeland
Dutton, Montana*

Thank you for the article. To have a fellow Lutheran of note express so well the dilemma I have experienced as a strong promoter of our faith and doctrine for these many years (I am 72) is comforting and enlightening.

Fasching has done a great service in proclaiming God's righteousness and striving for justice for all God's people, not just for those fortunate to have been baptized in the faith. In my opinion, this is an assertion of the Gospel message.

As we face the millennium, this is an appropriate time to grapple with the good news as it applies to all people, not only Lutherans. Continue to give us provocative articles so we can think, question, understand, and hopefully grow in grace.

*Margy Robinson
Cary, North Carolina*

Recycling LWT, with a twist

I am a member of Women of the ELCA at Our Savior Lutheran

Church (Marion Oaks), Ocala, Florida. I am a subscriber to LWT. I do enjoy it very much. I pass my issues of LWT to nursing homes and hospitals. Here is a letter I received from a lady that had read it at V.A. Hospital in Gainesville, Florida. The letter tells it all. It is better to recycle them in hospitals, and so forth, than in garbage cans.

*Cleta F. Piering
Ocala, Florida*

*Dear Mrs. Cleta Piering,
I found the Lutheran Woman Today that you had left in the waiting room at the V.A. Hospital in Gainesville. I was devouring it when we had to leave, so I took it with me. It was the one on prayer [May '96]. I have enjoyed it so much and have sent for a subscription.*

In return—since I stole it from the V.A.—I will leave some of my Methodist publications. I just wanted to thank you—it's a wonderful publication and I'm looking forward to receiving it on a regular basis.

*Connie Conine
Ocala, Florida*

A Study in Forgiveness

Thank you for carrying the article "Forgiveness: An Inter-disciplinary Approach" [November]. There are audiotapes and videotapes of the presentation at the National Conference of Forgiveness. If you want to become an associate in forgiveness studies, contact International Forgiveness Institute, Box 358, Ridgefield, CT 06877; phone 203-431-6092.

*Roy T. Lloyd
Ridgefield, Connecticut*

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● For the benefit of Women of the ELCA participants, articles relating to Women of the ELCA mission areas are marked, at their conclusion, with these symbols: **A**=action, **C**=community and **G**=growth.

● Unless otherwise cited, all Bible references are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

● Opinions expressed in the magazine are those of the writers and, except for the Women of the ELCA department and the Bible study, are not necessarily those of the Women of the ELCA.

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Whatever Happened to Awe?

Tom McGrath

I work in downtown Chicago and traipse across the Loop every morning. Too often I make the trip with my head down and my mind filled with worries about the day to come. One gray day shortly after Thanksgiving, I was about to cross State Street, "that great street," when a bus pulled in front of me and I had to wait. I was annoyed.

Off the bus came a mom and her young son. Stepping down from the bus, the boy stood on the curb with his hands on his hips. He looked up and down the street. "Whoa!" he cried to the world in general. "Who did all *that*?" For the first time that season I looked up and down and all around at the wondrous Christmas decorations on the storefronts and the lampposts and the newly planted trees. I smiled at the boy and said, "Thanks, I needed that."

I wish I had more awe in my life. I think Jesus wishes I did, too. I used to experience awe more frequently: when I was a kid, when I was new at my job, when I took the train downtown for the first 100 or so times, when I had the time to deliberately do the chores in my garden. I felt awe when my two daughters were born, when the waters of baptism flowed over their foreheads, and, years later, at an Easter vigil when their faces were lit up by candlelight.

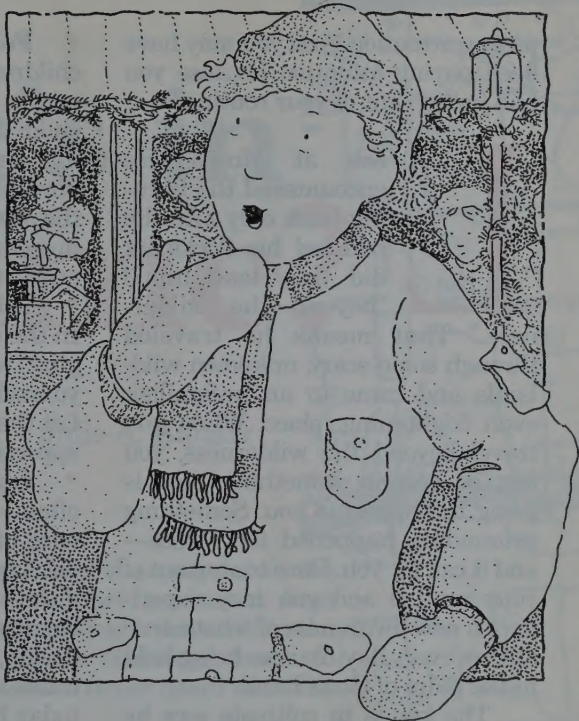
Whatever happened to awe? Well, in my search I dis-

covered that "awe" comes right after "awareness" in my *Harper's Topical Concordance*. Awe seems to follow awareness in life, as well. I suspect that there always will be a shortage of awe if you're simply not paying attention.

I think it can be hard for North Americans to remain awake and aware on a regular, daily basis. We have so many inducements and opportunities to avoid being truly present in our own lives. How often do you turn on the TV just for background noise, to mask the silence? How often do you eat and not taste, read and not absorb, touch and not feel?

The problem is *not* that there are too few awesome events, inventions, sights, sounds, and experiences in our world. Quite the opposite. Once people were amazed at silent moving pictures and then the talkies, but now we see movies with multimillion-dollar special effects and still leave the theater bored. People easily travel to distant lands or have them brought into their homes via television and movies. Mega-malls offer hundreds of stores and millions of merchandise items. In fact, there may be so many remarkable occurrences available to us that we're suffering from inflation of expectation. It takes more to even to raise an eyebrow.

I know that after a day of too many messages, too much stimula-



tion, too much diversion, I feel like the child at Christmas, sitting amid a pile of torn wrapping paper and strewn presents feeling somehow empty and deprived. What's missing? Certainly not more *things*. What's missing is the nourishing food of God's presence. It's my awareness of God's presence that produces awe.

The answer to the modern dilemma seems to be a kind of renunciation. Turn off the noise so you can hear. Stop the flashing lights so you can see. Stop wolfing down food so you can taste. Stop rushing so you can get somewhere in your spiritual life. "Be still and know that I am God."

When's the last time you experienced awe? What made that event different from your daily routine? I suspect it came because you were

paying attention. And you may have been paying attention because you had broken out of your routine.

Look at Moses. He encountered the burning bush only after he had led his flocks (or did they lead him?) “beyond the wilderness.” That means he traveled through some scary, unknown wildlands and came to an unfamiliar, even frightening, place. When you travel beyond the wilderness, you can be certain something new is going to happen to you. Something astounding happened for Moses—and it can for you. Dare to step out of your routine and you may experience a new awareness of what’s true all day, every day: You are being held in the palm of God’s hand.

The key is to cultivate awe by paying attention. You soon will come to realize that God is watching you with love. I once heard a man describe his profound prayer life this way: “I look at the good God, and the good God looks at me.” That’s awesome!

How can you increase the amount of awe in your life? Here are a few suggestions:

- **Take off your shoes.** Before Moses could approach the burning bush, he was admonished to take off his shoes. By doing so, he took on an attitude of respect. He also became more vulnerable and could feel the earth beneath his feet. Although you needn’t literally take off your shoes, you can signal your respect for God by getting down on your knees, praying with open hands, or coming to church services early and sitting in silence.

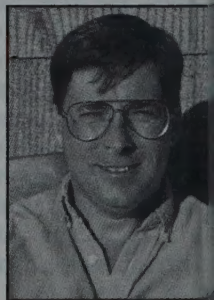
- **Follow a child around.** Little children aren’t as jaded as most adults. When you’re with a small child, don’t spend your time shushing and silencing. Rather, observe how delighted this child can be with the world. Go to the zoo, a park, a museum. Watch that child’s face—and learn.

- **Add some silence to your life.** In the quiet time, let go of your nagging worries and fears. Visualize yourself dropping them in God’s lap. Let the silence restore your ability to appreciate the goodness of God.

- **Suspend your disbelief.** Too often we feel that the direct experience of God’s love happened in the old days and to special people. Your disbelief limits your ability to feel wonder and awe. Start the day by saying, “If I did believe that God could touch my life in special ways today, how would I live?” Then act as if that, in fact, is true.

I don’t expect to encounter burning bushes in my life, but I can watch maples turn to flame each autumn and daffodils come back to life each spring. If I don’t distract myself, I can admit that I am a sinner who has been redeemed. Miracles are happening around me if only I choose to be aware. If I open my eyes and my heart, I will discover what happened to awe. **G**

Tom McGrath is executive editor of U.S. Catholic and Salt of the Earth magazines.



What's in a Name?

Julie A. Kanarr

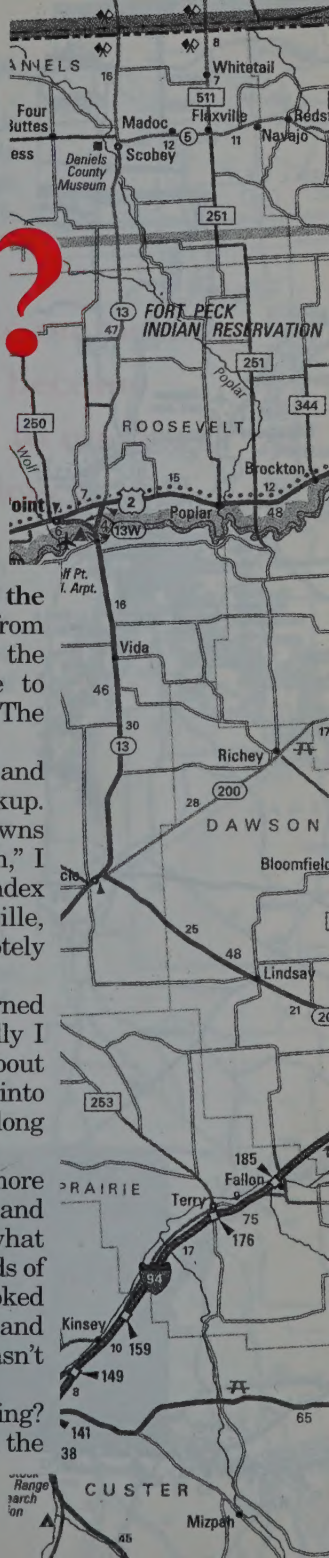
"We may have a call for you," said the assistant to the bishop, "in Flaxville." Having just graduated from Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota, I was visiting the Montana Synod Assembly while traveling home to Washington. *Flaxville, Montana*. I'd never heard of it. The name meant nothing to me.

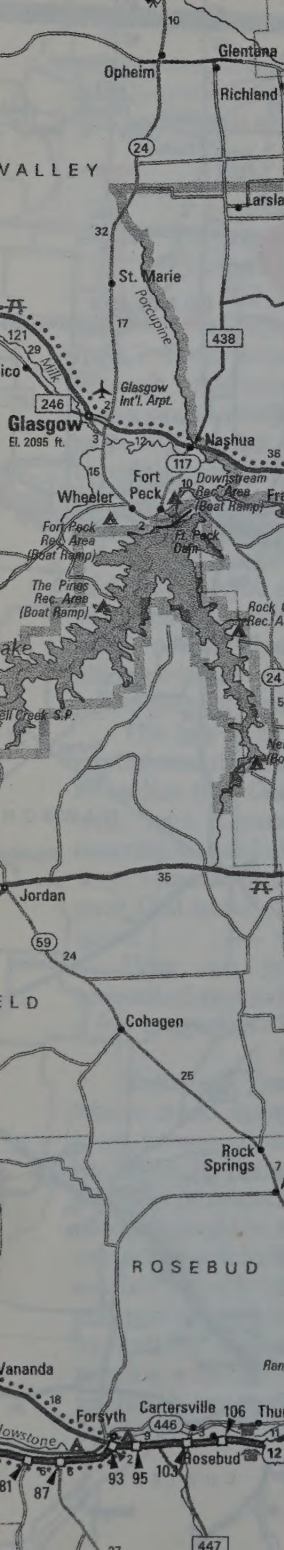
As soon as I could, I walked out to the parking lot and grabbed the road atlas from the front seat of my pickup. Finding Montana in the index, I scanned the list of towns for Flaxville. I didn't see it. "Maybe I misheard him," I thought. "Maybe he said, 'Platteville.'" So I read the index again. There was no Platteville, Catville, Ratville, Splatville, or any other place listed that even remotely resembled what I thought I'd heard.

Not quite ready to give up on Rand-McNally, I turned to the map of Montana and started searching. Finally I found the place in the far upper right-hand corner, about as far north in the state as one can go before bumping into Saskatchewan. It was out in the middle of nowhere, along with other places I'd never heard of.

I studied the map, wishing that it would reveal more information. I closed my eyes, took a deep breath, and repeated that name over and over, trying to imagine what the town was like. I drew a blank. I tried picturing fields of flax, but I wasn't sure that I even knew what flax looked like. All I had to go on was a name, a dot on the map, and the possibility of being called as pastor there. It wasn't much.

Did Moses have much more to go on in the beginning? God spoke to him from a burning bush, saying, "I am the





God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Exodus 3:6). Did Moses wonder if he heard God right? Being connected to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob put God on the historical map for Moses, for he would have known the stories of his ancestors, the stories of his people. Did Moses close his eyes, take a deep breath, and try to remember every detail of those stories? Did Moses stare intently at the burning bush, wishing that it would reveal some more information?

Moses needed more. Moses asked for God's name, so that he could tell the Israelites specifically who was sending him to them. In response, God says, "I AM WHO I AM" (Exodus 3:14). All he had to go on was an unfathomable name, a connection to the ancestors, and the calling to lead the Israelites out of slavery. It wasn't much.

Names take on meaning when they become connected to memory and experience, when we can place them on the map along with what we already recognize and know. Because of my experiences living in Flaxville, the name of the town is no longer a meaningless collection of syllables for me. No longer can I say that name with casual indifference. The name Flaxville evokes for me a mental image of a particular community in a particular place.

For Moses, it was his experience of God that transformed God's name from a mere collection of letters into a source of strength, meaning, and power. The burning bush, the Exodus, and the events of Mt. Sinai infused God's name with new meaning. In Hebrew, God's name "I AM WHO I AM"—also translated "I am who I will be"—is a verb. Bound up in God's name is all of his power and action on behalf of his people.

For Moses and Israel, God's name was spoken with trepidation and reverence because they had a deep awareness of God's activity in their lives. To speak God's name was to address the one to whom the people of Israel owed their freedom. Given all that God had done for them, Moses and the people of Israel could not speak God's name with anything other than the deepest feelings of reverence, gratitude, and awe. They dared not utter God's name casually. Indeed, God's name became so holy that they dared not utter it at all, lest they acc

dentally dishonor it. God's name became sacred because of all that God had done.

How we speak of God is connected to how we think of God. The way in which we use God's name reveals what that name means for us. What does it say of our relationship with God if we speak God's name thoughtlessly, using it only to add extra emphasis to expressions of anger, frustration, or disappointment?

In the Small Catechism, Martin Luther explains that we are to call upon God "in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving." Luther recognized that there is more to the right use of God's name than refraining from taking that name in vain. Because our language and thoughts are intertwined, rightly using God's name becomes more than a matter of cleaning up our language to remove a few extraneous swear words. Rightly using God's name is a matter of nurturing our relationship with God. It is a matter of being mindful of all that God has done for us. Rightly using God's name is a matter of paying attention to what we mean when we invoke the name of God.

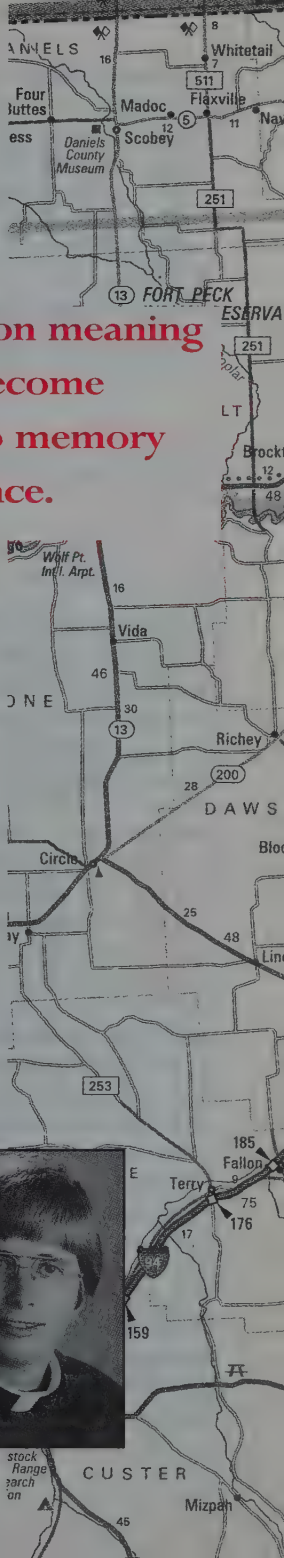
Memory and experience infuse names with meaning. We are graced with the memory of God's creative and redemptive presence within the human realm through the witness of Scripture. We experience God's continuous presence through the Holy Spirit. Unlike Moses, we do not encounter God speaking to us from a burning bush. But, like Moses, we have been given both God's name and a calling. Through baptism we bear the name of God. In baptism we are called children of God. God's triune name—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is poured out upon us.

Bearing God's name gives meaning to our lives and connects us to God. To speak God's name is to address the one who gives us life and salvation, the one in whom our future rests. The God of our ancestors in faith—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—is also our God—the God of Allison, Joey, Julie, and you. Did we hear God right? Most definitely so. **GC**

The Rev. Julie A. Kanarr serves Zion and Pleasant Prairie Lutheran churches in Flaxville, Montana.



Names take on meaning when they become connected to memory and experience.

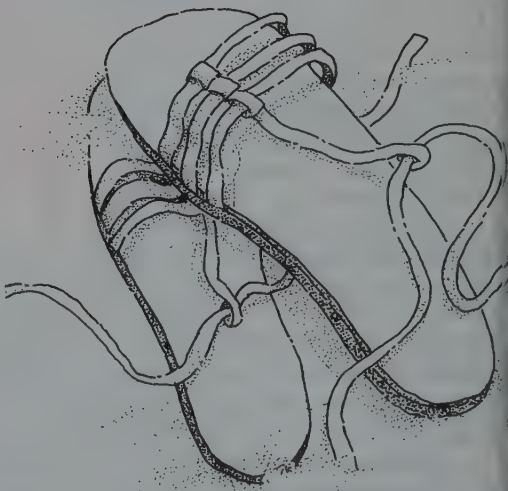


Seen any burning bushes?

Take Off Your Shoes

Mary Benet McKinney

There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." Exodus 3:2-3



The popular TV series *Touched by an Angel* depicts angels as television production managers, halfway house supervisors, airplane mechanics, home health-care nurses, and more. But angels are not limited to human images. In this story from Exodus, the angel is apparently the bush, in the burning, in the flaming. No winged or unwinged creature here. Only the burning.

And such a mysterious burning it is! It doesn't consume or destroy. What it does—and does well—is get Moses' attention. He is curious, fascinated, probably even spooked! This isn't business as usual. It needs checking out.

We read what happens next in

Exodus 3:4-12. The Lord sees him coming and calls out, *Moses, Moses!* Moses knows the expected answer and responds, *Here I am.* But then there comes the strange directive *Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.*

So, what do we have? A barefoot Moses advancing toward a burning, talking bush. More than angels here? Obviously! *I am the God of your father; the God of Abraham....* This was too much for Moses. *And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.* So now we have a frightened, barefoot Moses hiding from a burning, talking bush.

But we all know that you can't hide from God. So the voice in the burning bush continues, *I will send*

you...to bring my people...out of Egypt.

Disregarding how useless it is to argue with a bush—or with God—Moses gives it his best try. But to no avail! Instead of wasting time arguing, God gets right to the point: *I will be with you.*

Fast-forward from Moses to us today. What, who, where is the burning bush for us? Might it be the doubt, the disappointment, the fear, the anger that rages within us? Maybe it is physical pain. Could it be, at times, the word of God? Remember how the two disciples on the road to Emmaus wondered, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us...while he was opening the scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:32).

Whatever, whoever, or wherever it is, the burning is in the very center of our bodies, our hearts, our minds, our lives, our families, our churches, our society. And while the burning is frightening, we are challenged by this story to befriend it, to get as close as we dare, to touch it with our skin, our innermost being, without shoes or anything else to separate or protect us from its intensity.

This burning creates holy ground, a place where God touches, speaks, calls, challenges, assures, and commissions us. Where is this holy ground? It is anywhere God needs it to be, at any time that we are open to the touch, the call, the challenge.

God wants to send us. To whom? A child, a spouse, a coworker, a friend, a total stranger. Often we are

tempted to follow Moses’ example and at least try to talk God out of it. But experience tells us how futile such an approach is. The graced response, terrifying as it may be, is: “Let me be and do whatever you need me to be or do for your people.” And God will say, “I will be with you.”

It is particularly notable that the bush in the story, though burning, was not destroyed. Nor will we be.

And while the burning is frightening, we are challenged by this story to befriend it.

This is not to say that we won’t *feel* like we’re being destroyed! But if we stay in the burning, touching the reality as intimately as we dare, we will know the comfort of God’s promise: “*When you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. You are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you*” (Isaiah 43:2b, 4a).

May we take notice of and pay attention to life’s burning bushes and allow them to talk to us, to challenge us, and to send us out. And may we have the courage and faith to take off our shoes! **G**



Mary Benet McKinney, OSB, is an international lecturer and management consultant and

author of Sharing Wisdom (Tabor Publishing).

Living Witnesses

James Arne Nestingen

The story of Moses and the burning bush still can spark conversation. Some see the miracle in the bush itself. But

I believe the continuing fire is not the real miracle. We must look to Moses for that. Rescued from the waters by Miriam, his sister, Moses grew up in the palace, apparently spoiled rotten. He had a temper that was a match for the bush, bursting and burning if not forever, surely for long enough.

In one such flash, Moses struck a man dead. First he hid the remains; then detected, he ran. In another land, still inflamed by his fears, Moses took work as a shepherd, moving from the palace to fields and troughs to keep himself safe. There God appeared to him, a murderer on the run, to make Moses the deliverer of God's own people. The miracle is that God chose such a contentious man. Even more miraculous is that Moses heard, believed, and acted.

Epiphanies are like that, miraculous in their ordinariness.

For all the subtle differences, the nuances, twists, and turns, epiphanies generally come in times of trouble. Sometimes, as with Moses, the trouble is due to our own making. More often, the difficulties grow out of what appear to be ordinary circumstances: the loss of a parent, spouse, or child; conflict at work; the low-grade animosities that dog family relationships, sometimes erupting into open flame.

A person could wish it otherwise, but for some reason, it generally takes trouble before we look up from our routines to hear a witness that moves us. And often the faith stories of old that grip us have a shadowy background. As Moses gave his witness he said something to the effect of, "I was on the run when I saw this burning bush...." As we tell our story, we might say, "My husband had just died," "My daughter was out of control," or "The congregation was so divided it looked as if we would never come together."

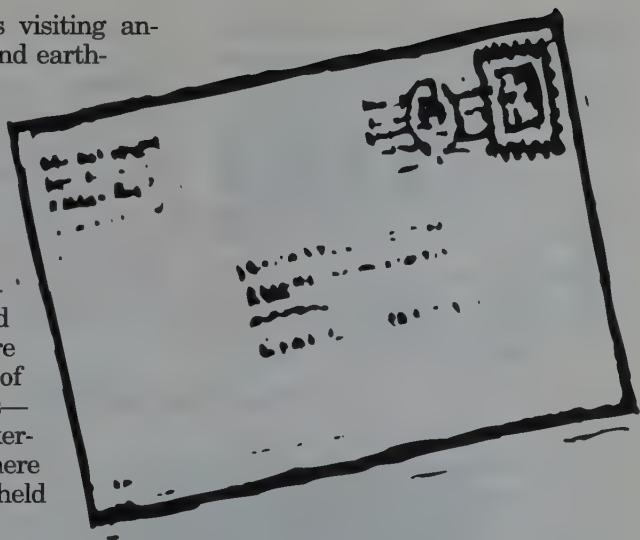
Moses saw flames—whatever or whoever fueled them. And there's more: Out of the burning, Moses heard a voice. Sometimes epiphanies

are as spectacular as visiting angels, a roaring wind and earthquakes, miraculous appearances. More often, epiphanies are as common as a neighbor stopping by for coffee, a friend calling with some encouragement, a letter arriving from an old acquaintance. There are literally thousands of variations, but always—blazing flames or flickering commonalties—there is a voice and a word held there.

Two angels came into my own life disguised as a couple from Iowa. He was a big Schleswig-Holstein Dane. He had hands twice the usual size. As big as they were, he could make them do the most intricate woodwork. Every day but Sunday she dressed in an old cotton housedress and terry-cloth slippers. At the corner of her mouth, from early morning until late at night, hung a stubby, unfiltered cigarette.

I was their pastor, as green as the western Oregon valley where we all lived. Getting exposed to death's inevitable grip, to the quiet horrors and anonymous heroics of the everyday, I was running scared. "Stop by, reverend, we need to talk," they said. And so we would sit, the two of them hardened by years of living and softened by the grace that welled out of Word and Sacrament, spilling over with Christ's comfort. And in their witness, I heard God's word.

When it comes to witnesses, some things are predictable. Witnesses generally have their greatest effect in times of difficulty. There is



always a word spoken by another that reaches into the turmoil to assert Christ's sure grip. Lutherans of earlier generations used to call that word the *viva vox evangelii*, the living voice of the gospel. It brings assurance of pardon, of life in the midst of death, of hope in the face of despair.

But for all that predictability, there is another surety: The good Lord will mix things up just enough to provide some difference, some color, some nuance, a uniqueness to make us say, "I can't believe it happened that way, but you know, I wouldn't have wanted it any other way." That qualifies as an amen. C

The Rev. James Arne Nestingen is professor of church history at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota. He wrote the 1995 Women of the ELCA Bible study appearing in LWT, The Hidden Promise: A Study of the Ten Commandments.

You Can Be a Witness!

Marta Poling-Goldenne




Susan listened day after day at lunchtime to the personal struggles of her friend and coworker Kathy. During the previous six months, Kathy's marriage had been unraveling. Their lunchtime conversations revolved around Kathy's fears about the prospects of being a single parent on a secretary's income and the pain of ending an 18-year marriage. Each night Susan prayed for Kathy. Susan never told Kathy that she was praying for her, however, nor did she offer to pray with her. She did not speak of her faith or invite Kathy to come to church with her.

One Monday morning, Kathy appeared at work with new

energy and spirit. "I went to church yesterday for the first time in 25 years!" she told Susan. "I didn't know what I'd been missing! I feel so much more hopeful today. I know that God will give me strength to make it through this situation."

Susan shared her friend's joy. "That's great! I don't know how I would get through life without faith. I try to get to church every week for a recharge of hope."

Kathy responded, "Then why have you been keeping it a secret?"



Each of us probably could share a similar story of a time when we have missed the opportunity to give witness to the hope that is within us. Our reluctance to share our faith is often born of insecurity and fear. We don't want to impose ourselves on others. We fear being labeled and dismissed as pushy. We are afraid that we will say the wrong thing. Too often our excuses for an invisible witness sound like those of Moses: *But suppose they do not believe me or listen to me....O my Lord, I have never been eloquent....I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.*

When it comes to witnessing to the hope within us, we often prefer Moses' answer: *O my Lord, please send someone else.*

However, *we* are those whom God is sending to give a witness to the gospel hope of salvation. Like Moses, God promises to be with us and give us the words needed to share our faith with others. In our moments of reluctance, God comes to us with the same words told to

Moses: *Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak.* Even through our halting witness, God can speak a word of hope. Even through our fear, our witness can help another come into a new relationship with Christ and Christ's church.

How can we give a witness to the hope within us?

Care in crisis

Sociologists tell us that in times of crisis, people often are most open to hear the gospel or respond to an invitation by a trusted friend to attend a church service or event. Caring friendships during difficult times are an important witness to the hope within us.

On the job

Most people spend one third of their lives at work, yet we often miss opportunities for witnessing in the context of our lives' labor. When we make ethical decisions, when we advocate for the broader human consequences of a decision, when we take a stand for the global consequences of our industry, when we treat our coworkers and clients well, we are giving a witness to the hope within us.

At home

Our families are a core arena for faith sharing. Conversations with our children or grandchildren about faith provide the backbone for their coming into a relationship with Jesus Christ. Learning and understanding the values of the family has a strong impact on the kinds of choices children will make as adults.

Come and see

Time devoted to building relationships with family, friends, and co-workers gives us the credibility and collateral to pray for another, to name Christ to another, and to extend an invitation to “come and see.” Like Philip’s witness to Nathanael (see John 1:45-46), we have credibility in our witness when it comes within the context of a genuine relationship. “Come and see” has the power to persuade when the people hearing these words know that the one who is speaking them cares.

How can you and your congregation move from a “reluctant Moses” to an “inviting Philip” style of witness?

1. Begin by praying for God to give you new courage to witness boldly. Ask God to open your eyes and ears to opportunities in which you and your congregation can speak a word of hope and truth in relationships.

2. Experiment with using name-dropping! At work, at home, on the soccer field, at school, in the recreation center, look for chances to name-drop on God’s behalf. “Thanks be to God,” “Only by God’s grace,” and “God bless you” are all ways of signaling to others that your hope in life is not based on luck, chance, karma, or choice.

3. Ask your congregation to hold you and the other members accountable for faith sharing. A sermon series, adult forums, confirmation training, small groups, and Sunday school lessons on faith-sharing skills all increase the likelihood that members will connect faith sharing with their lives as disciples of Jesus Christ.

4. Increase the opportunities for

people to practice telling their faith story among believers. Begin “Faith-Sharing Moments” once a month in your worship services. Each month ask a different member to share a five- to ten-minute witness during worship, responding to one of these questions: *How has being a Christian made a difference in your life? What does it mean to you to be a Christian? Why are you a member of this faith community?* These kinds of opportunities allow believers to practice their witness. When you have thought about and spoken this kind of witness in a safe community, it is easier to risk doing the same thing in a more ambiguous environment, like the workplace.

5. Initiate regular “Invite a Friend to Church” Sundays. Print invitations to the Christmas and Easter services and ask members to distribute them. Once a month, include your church brochure in the worship bulletin. Ask members to pass them on to coworkers or friends who are without a church home, and extend an invitation to “join me in worship next Sunday.”

Remember, you are and can be a witness to the hope that is within you. God can use even the most reluctant among us to name the name of Jesus to another person. If God can use Moses, then God can use you! Go! Witness! **GAC**

The Rev. Marta Poling-Goldenne serves as associate director for evangelism in the ELCA Division for Congregational Ministries.



Thy Will Be Done

Meredith Woods Potter

The young woman had barely seated herself in my office when she blurted out, "I've decided that I want to be ordained." I'm not sure what she expected my reply to be, but I could tell from her face she hadn't expected me to ask, "Why?"

Nevertheless, my question caused her to launch into a long list of reasons, most of which were prefaced by the words, "I want to..." When she finally paused, I asked another question: "You've told me what you want. But what is God calling you to do?" This time there was no quick answer.

Finally, she spoke with hesitation, "I'm not sure. I guess that's why I've come to talk." Thus began a spiritual journey. I became the woman's spiritual director, guiding her to listen for God's call and to discern God's will for her life.

The word "discernment" comes from the Latin word *discernere*, meaning to sort out, to separate, to distinguish. My task was to help her sort out all the things happening in

her life, to help her see what might be signs from God, to help her separate her desires from God's desire for her life.

In today's society, voices from many sources bombard our lives, each beckoning us to give that voice our energy, our attention, our commitment. Sometimes we hear the calls of society, our family, our career, and our ambition instead of the Holy Spirit's call to do God's will. Discerning the difference takes careful listening in prayer.

I often use a prayer technique attributed to Ignatius of Loyola, a 16th-century monk best known for his spiritual exercises. This form of prayer is designed to help people recognize signs of God's presence in all aspects of their lives. The process begins by framing the situation about which one is praying in the form of a negative statement: "God is *not* calling me to quit my job; God is *not* calling us to place our son in boarding school; God is *not* calling me to sell the family home and move into a retirement community."

As I hold the statement in

prayer, I ask God to show me signs to confirm or deny that the statement is God's will. I consider every thought that comes to my mind—every reason for or against the statement—as a possible sign from God. Sometimes a reason pops into my mind that seems to give me a clear sense of the answer, and I know that God has given me a sign. Sometimes I have no clear sense, so I enlist a friend or loved one to join me in prayer for discernment. I remind prayer partners that they have not been asked to give me advice. Rather, I have asked them to pray *with* me for a sign from God.

When the choice seems clear to me and my prayer partners, I make a tentative decision. I share this decision with God and give thanks for the clarity that has come through prayer. I share my decision with my prayer partners, but I do *not* act on my decision. I live with the decision for several days, paying attention to my feelings. A sense of joy and inner peace, a sense of relief, and an especially good night's sleep are often signs that God is affirming my decision. Only then do I act on my decision with assurance that my will is in accordance with God's will.

On the other hand, if my tentative decision leads to anxiety and unrest, I take these signs from God that my will is not yet in accord with God's will. I continue the discernment process, this time restating the condition in the opposite way: "It is

A sense of joy and inner peace, a sense of relief, and an especially good night's sleep are often signs that God is affirming my decision.

time to quit my job; God *is* calling me to sell the family home." Once again, I do not act until my prayer partners and I receive positive affirmation of God's will.

I began by telling you about a woman who had come into my office with a desire to be ordained. It was more than two years later that she discerned what God was calling her to do. Only then could she proceed with assurance that her will was in accord with God's will for her.

Although it is of critical importance for all Christians to listen for the direction in ministry in which God is calling us, God's will can be discerned for every aspect of our lives, for every decision, both great and small. Our decisions can be made in the context of God's will for our lives when we seek God's signs through discerning prayer. **GC**

The Rev. Meredith Woods Potter is an Episcopal priest who serves as director of academic affairs at Seabury-Western Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois.

Who, Me? Called?

Gregory F. Augustine Pierce

I was recently at a meeting for a church group that was planning a conference in New Mexico. The planners became very excited when they discussed the side excursions that they could offer the participants.

"We can visit all the holy places around Santa Fe," they said. "The Native American burial grounds, the old Spanish mission, the cathedral, the holy mountains, and...."

"I know a Christian businessman who works there," I offered. "We could go sit around his desk."

They all looked at me as if I had just said something in a foreign language. And I had. Most of us church people speak of a holy place as a place where spiritual experience happens—maybe a church or even a mountaintop. We forget it also can be in our office, around the kitchen table, or at a political rally—anywhere we feel God's presence.

"Vocation" is another example of a misunderstood church word. Many people think the word "vocation" is reserved for those in the ordained ministry, just as "holy place" is reserved for locations of special religious significance.

"Vocation," however, simply means "calling." It implies



All people, by virtue of their humanity, and all Christians, by virtue of their baptism, have been called by God.

that, in some mysterious way, God has called a specific person to a particular occupation or life work. When we use "vocation" to refer to the call to ordained ministry, we are being accurate—such people do, indeed, have a vocation.

If, however, by using the word "vocation" exclusively for ordained ministry we imply—even by omission—that God cares enough only to call people to that one specific career or state in life, then we are making a huge mistake.

The idea that ordained ministry is somehow better, more important, or inherently holier than other work is obviously not true, as most ordained ministers are the first to point out. All people, by virtue of their humanity, and all Christians, by virtue of their baptism, have been called by God. We all have a vocation.

More specifically, many of us are called—by virtue of our talents, our interests, our opportunities, our states in life—to particular vocations that may have little or nothing to do with church ministry. "He was born to be a musician," we say. Or, "I can't imagine her being anything other than a doctor."

People are called to be husbands or wives, mothers or fathers, sons or daughters, grandmas and grandpas, aunts and uncles, cousins and friends. They may find themselves at various times in their lives working in widely differing jobs, doing all

kinds of volunteer activities, caring for children or the ill, staying at home on a full- or part-time basis. They might be unemployed or underemployed, retired, or studying. All of these are vocations in that they can be what God wants us to be doing at a

particular time or under a particular circumstance.

Would we act any differently if we were convinced that what we do every day was a call from God? I think we would.

First of all, **we would see the meaning of what we do very differently.** Here's how Margaret Hobbethwaite, a homemaker, speaks of the meaning she finds in doing housework: *"I often resent the time I spend tidying the house, doing the laundry, cleaning the kitchen. I must remind myself that this is a share in God's work, this is the task of creation—sorting, tidying, ordering, bringing harmony out of chaos. This thinking gives dignity and spiritual worth to tasks that could be boring."*

"God's work is never ended, nor is a mother's. Creation was not just a big bang in the beginning; it is an ongoing labor throughout time. It includes peak moments like childbirth and the tedious, daily tasks of tidying up."

Secondly, **we would deal with other people differently if we felt that we were exercising a vocation.** Coworkers, customers, clients, bosses, fellow commuters,

and even competitors each would be seen as opportunities of grace rather than obstacles to overcome.

Maxine Dennis, a cashier at a supermarket, sees her job this way: *"I feel that my job consists of a lot more than ringing up orders, taking people's money, and bagging their groceries. The most important part of my job is not the obvious. Rather, it's the manner in which I present myself to others that will determine whether my customers will leave the store feeling better or worse because of their brief encounter with me. For by doing my job well, I know I have a chance to do God's work, too."*

"Because of this, I try to make each of my customers feel special. While I serve them, they become the most important people in my life."

Finally, if we all had a vocation, **we would make sure that we took care to balance the various responsibilities in our lives:** job, family, community, church. If, for example, I am called by God to be a husband and father (which I am), then I had better not let my other responsibilities detract from my family life. But if I am also called to be an editor and publisher (which I am), then that, too, must be faithfully attended to. If, on top of both of these, I am also called to be a good citizen, neighbor, and church member (yes, yes, and yes), then the task of balancing my life is a serious and holy one indeed.

Does this mean that we are always doing the will of God or that we are always hearing or responding to God's call correctly? Certainly not. Many people ignore or misinter-

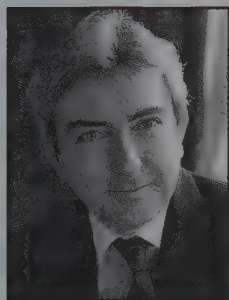
Would we act any differently if we were convinced that what we do every day was a call from God?

pret their true vocation or vocations. Some fight it, while others insist they are called to something totally wrong for them. Most of us make several attempts at responding before we get it right. All of this, by the way, is equally true for ordained ministers and laypeople.

Thinking that God calls only a few people to one particular type of ministry or work and leaves the rest of us uncalled, or thinking that there would be even one child of God not called to something important, is to underestimate God's concern for each of us.

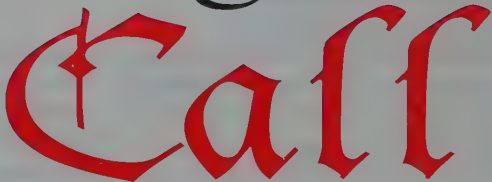
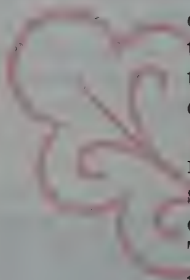
So, the next time someone asks if you have a vocation, be sure to answer, "Of course I do, and so do you." Then take him or her on a tour of your holy places. **GA**

Gregory F. Augustine Pierce, Chicago, Illinois, is copublisher and editor of ACTA Publications, a publisher of Christian books and tapes. He is past president of the National Center for the Laity, a Chicago-based organization that promotes vocation of the laity in and to the world.



Hearing the *Call*

Ruth Ann Shriver


**T**here was no flaming bush at the door of the classroom in Wright Hall on the University of Northern Iowa campus that warm September night in 1987. Nothing out of the ordinary marked the beginning of a journey that, over the course of 10 years, has remarkably changed my life. It was my last semester at the university, and I had most of my required courses behind me. With three hours of electives remaining, I decided to add biblical Greek to my already full semester.

Why biblical Greek? One reason was because I recently had participated in a Bible study that included some references to biblical Greek, and it made the study extraordinarily rich. I, too, wanted to study the New Testament in its original language. But I did not know that when I crossed the threshold into that classroom, I was standing on holy ground.

As we introduced ourselves in class that night, we told why we were there. This was not a group of people who had come out of curiosity or a general interest or just for fun, as I had done. Here was a small group of women and men of all ages who were taking a required course in biblical Greek to prepare for entering seminary after graduation.

I was shocked. And at that particular moment there may as well have been a burning bush where the professor stood. His words affected me like the word of God to Moses: "Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place

on which you are standing is holy ground" (Exodus 3:5). I felt in the company of the chosen, ones to whom God had spoken, whom God had called to be messengers of the Word. I was stunned and then embarrassed at my naiveté. What was I thinking to have chosen this class? Seminary, as a word and as a destination, had no meaning in my life. After all, I worked in retail clothing, and my focus in college was business and humanities. I wanted to run from the room. I wanted to hide. Who was I to presume to take such a course?

But my professor, Pastor Edgar A. Brammer, a retired campus pastor and mentor to many young men and women entering seminary, spoke to me with compassion and made me comfortable that first night. And so I stayed in the class. The other seminary-bound people accepted me, encouraged me, and helped me discern my gifts and my calling.

At the end of that semester, with graduation ahead of me, I still wondered what God had in mind. Pastor Brammer and several of my classmates encouraged me to apply to the seminary. I struggled inwardly. I prayed a lot. Me, go into ministry? God, how could you possibly mean this?

The class work didn't frighten me. Learning and

school and books are essential to life as far as I am concerned. But it was the preaching of the Word that chilled my heart. Like Moses, I prayed to the Lord, "O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue" (Exodus 4:10). My speech impediment was fear. When asked to introduce myself to a group of people,

Now it appeared that God was calling me to something different.

fear had often rendered me mute. How, I wondered, could God ask me to embark on a journey of this magnitude?

I was finishing my college degree strictly out of a desire to complete something I had begun years before. There was little joy in it. What difference would it make? After graduation I would continue doing the same things, but as a college graduate. Now it appeared that God was calling me to something different. Emotions stirred within me that long had been dormant. I felt I had been given new life. It was terrifying and exciting.

Pastor Brammer and my own pastor, Homer Larsen, and I began to explore the possibilities. After a visit to Wartburg Seminary in

Dubuque, Iowa, I decided to apply for entrance, secretly thinking I would not be accepted. No such luck. One year after I graduated from college, I found myself commuting to my first classes at the seminary.

It was not easy. There were times when my fears overwhelmed me and I wanted to quit. But the prayers of

my classmates, mentors, and family members encouraged me. These people also modeled God's love and commitment to me so that I might love and trust God in this journey set before me.

Everything in my life changed. After living in the same house for 25 years with my husband and three daughters, change did not come easily. The resulting changes brought an end to a troubled marriage. I moved three times in one year. I questioned God's decision more than once. But the pain and uncertainty of those times diminish in contrast to the joy that God's call has brought into my life. Joy comes when I rest in God's care, when I trust in God's plan for my life.

Today, nearly 10 years later, God's call continues to surprise me. My soul is fed by the warmth of the people I serve and by the beauty of this rugged corner of northeast Iowa where I live. Slowly I am learning what it means to give my life over to the care of the one who created me, and that trusting God and letting go of my fears bring joy and meaning to life. **GAC**

The Rev. Ruth Ann Shriver serves First Lutheran, McGregor, Iowa, and Zion Lutheran in Clayton Center, Iowa. She offers this article "in loving memory of my mentor and friend Pastor Edgar A. Brammer, who died on October 29, 1996."

Have you ever considered ordained ministry? Or perhaps serving as a consecrated diaconal minister, deaconess, or commissioned associate in ministry is nudging you? If you would like help in exploring your call to ministry, start by reading *What Shall I Say? Discerning God's Call to Ministry*. This 84-page book was prepared by the Division for Ministry as a first step before a person begins theological study and the candidacy process of the ELCA. To order, call Augsburg Fortress at 800-328-4648 (\$5.95, code number LT34-1-2106; or in Spanish, LT69-7713).

Discernment happens in prayer and in conversation with those who know you best or with someone trained to guide you. Talk with your pastor. *What Shall I Say?* offers questions for reflection and discussion. Call your synod office and ask to talk with the staff member who relates to candidacy. For additional information, contact Madelyn Busse at 800-638-3522, ext. 2887.

*Madelyn Busse
Director for Candidacy
ELCA Division for Ministry*

Follow the Leader

Marj Leegard

It is Easter season and the snow is almost gone. The memory remains. Pure white, fluffy snow makes wonderful tracks. Children play games by tramping out great circles and making paths that intersect the centers.

Playing Follow the Leader in the snow hardly prepares us for either following the leader or *being* leaders in church activities. When as children we flew around the snow circle there were no stopping places for discussions. We ran. And ran some more. We ran until only a cup of cocoa with a marshmallow melting on top could restore us to normal breathing. In our gatherings as a church, however, we have many stopping places. We propose. We discuss. We re-propose. We vote and *then* we run.

Have you attended church meetings during which your hair straightened, your skin wrinkled, and your brain curdled? When these horrors assail me, I realize I've forgotten *what* we are doing and instead have begun to fret about the complexities of *how* we are doing it.

We want to be children again with all the paths marked out cleanly in the pure and sparkling snow. Although there are differences between the children and adults, the purposes for gathering remain constant. And constant are the "always words."

The 'always words'

"And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age'" (Matthew 28:18-20).

These are the always words of what we are about. These are the always words of why we are here. Every organization, every generation, every geographical location, every new challenge, every opportunity, every need is given the question of *how* to do the always words.

My grandmother Addie and her neighbors needed a church. Addie was a widow, a farmer, and mother of five small children. Her name appears at the very beginning of the list of people who contracted to build a church building at the beginning of this century. Are you surprised a woman would head the list? Every signer was a woman!

We walk where the Spirit leads us in paths others have marked and in paths we mark for others. Let us give thanks for leaders and followers by raising a cup of hot chocolate. And don't forget the marshmallow. **G**

LWT columnist Marj Leegard is from Detroit Lakes, Minnesota.

'I AM Has Sent Me to You'

Donna Hacker Smith

Read: Exodus 3:1—4:31, the study text. Focus on the memory verse, Exodus 3:14.

Sing or read: "We All Are One in Mission" (*With One Voice* 755).

Leader: In this session we join Moses as he stands on sacred ground. We witness his call to God's mission and listen as the divine name is entrusted to him. As familiar as the story is, we are prompted to reflect anew on the mission to which we are called and the holy name that is entrusted to us.

Group: "Thus you shall say...I AM has sent me to you."

Leader: In breathless anticipation, we stand with Moses at the sacred place and encounter the force that is our God. Unable to resist, we find ourselves also being sent forth in mission.

Group: Open to God's will and direction, we listen for the call as it comes to us today.

Leader: How fearful it is to be called to bring the word of freedom, of hope, of renewal to places of need!

Group: And yet, how comforting it is to depend upon the God who goes with us, empowering us for mission!

Leader: Entrusted with the sacred name, enlivened by the Holy Spirit, we dare to share the good news of redemption with all who would hear. We pray for bravery and strength to proclaim God's love and grace in places of oppression and need.

Group: In our homes and schools, among friends and family, in the marketplace and the hospital room, we are called to speak God's name with courage and compassion.

Leader: Called in baptism, propelled by the Spirit, we share in the mission of Moses, of the prophets, of the disciples of Christ of every place and time.

All: "Thus you shall say...I AM has sent me to you."

For Further Reflection:

Just as Moses was called, you are called. How is your life shaped by the call you have received from God? As you reflect on your life, are there relationships or activities that might be your personal mission challenge? **GC**

The Rev. Donna Hacker Smith, a Bible study leader and retreat leader, serves at St. James Lutheran in Forreston, Illinois.

From Slavery to Service

A Study of Exodus



Diane L. Jacobson

Bible Study, Session 4

The Call of Moses: Mission in the Name of the LORD

Study Text: Exodus 3–4

Memory Verse

God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” He said further, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘I AM has sent me to you’”(Exodus 3:14).

Overview

In Session 4 we look at Moses’ call from God at the burning bush. We will think about sacred ground, encounters with God, and mission. We will then hear, through Moses, the revelation of God’s sacred name and think about what we are and are not told about the nature of God.

Opening

Direct our vision, LORD, that we might see all that is miraculous around us. Enflame our hearts and lead us on those paths that you would have us walk. And be with us as you send us forth. This we ask in Christ’s name. Amen.

Hymn

Read or sing together “How Firm a Foundation” (*Lutheran Book of Worship* 507).

The Call

Read Exodus 3:1-6. Notice the intriguing way this chapter begins: Moses is tending the sheep of his father-in-law, just as

he will later shepherd Israel, the flock he will bring through the wilderness to the mountain of God. But at this point, Moses, the homeless shepherd, is caught off guard by and drawn toward a miraculous bush. From its midst he is called.

We know this experience involves a call because we hear the distinct marks of a call in the conversation. Moses receives a call much as other prophetic figures like Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1) and Isaiah (Isaiah 6) receive calls. In verse 4, the LORD calls—“Moses, Moses!”—repeating his name twice. Moses responds with the prescribed prophetic response to a divine call, “Here I am!”

- 1.** This text gives us a vision of a leader experiencing the holy presence of God and finding a calling in it. What contemporary call stories have you heard? How do they compare to Moses’ experience? How is God’s call different from others? What different kinds of calls do people receive?

The Burning Bush

- 2.** Moses’ call came to him first not through hearing but through seeing. Count the number of times the action words “to see,” “to look,” or “to observe” are used in Exodus 3:2-4.

What Moses saw pulled him in; Moses looked and he turned aside to see this great sight, and the LORD saw that he turned aside to see. The power of sight, of vision, pulled Moses first by engaging his curiosity. Gradually the pull of mystery captured him, and finally he was drawn in by the insistence of a divine call.

Moses’ call, like many prophetic calls, is marked by a sign. Here the sign blazes before Moses and before us in the form of a bush, unconsumed, burning with fire. It is powerful, breath-taking, and unmistakably cosmic. The power of divine presence in it cannot be consumed.

Even without the bush, the fire holds its own power—the elemental power of light and heat. We are reminded of the power of the pillar of light that will, in years to come, lead Israel

through the desert. We are reminded of the tongues of fire that will descend at Pentecost and the liturgical power of the eternal light.

3. Pause for a minute and think about times when you have been drawn to fire. Why do you think God might have chosen a burning bush as a place for the divine presence?

Holy Ground

God pronounces the site of the bush to be holy ground (Exodus 3:5). Moses obeys the commands and hides his face out of fear. Standing on holy ground in the presence of God, Moses was right to be fearful. Later in Exodus we are told that no one can look at the face of God and live (see Exodus 33:20-23; see also 1 Timothy 6:16 and John 6:46). We might pass this off merely as a habit of reverence, but it is more than that. Whenever we encounter God, the old self dies, and we cannot remain the same. Ground is holy not only because of God's presence, but also because God's voice is heard, God's holy word is spoken, and we are changed.

4. What places in your life do you consider "holy ground" or "sacred space" (not just church buildings)? What happens to you in these places? How have you experienced the power of God's face or God's presence to change you?

The Mission

For Moses, this holy ground is not an ending place; it is a sending place. Though the burning bush was a place where Moses paused to find assurance, it was primarily a place where Moses looked outward to the journey, to the mission, to the mountain, and to the promised land. What Moses saw helped him to hear what was to come. From the midst of the bush, God speaks.

5. **Read Exodus 3:7-12.** To help see and hear the breadth of God's action, fill in the chart listing the "T" verbs, or action words, that tell what God has done, is doing, and will do in the future.

	God's Activities
Past Actions	
Present Action	
Future Action	

The whole encounter at the burning bush has a precise context and a specific purpose. God has heard cries of pain and is responding to them. The enslavement of the Israelites in Egypt stands against the purposes and intent of the LORD, and Moses is called to be the instrument of God's deliverance.

Moses' Objections

Whereas Moses' reaction to *seeing* God was fear, his reaction to *hearing* God was to object to the task that God was giving to him.

Moses was not the only prophet to object. In their various calls, the prophets were always given fair opportunity to object. And each one reacted out of a deeply individual understanding of his or her own potential weakness. Jeremiah proclaimed that he was too young (Jeremiah 1:6); Isaiah cried that he was a man of sinful lips who dwelt among a people of unclean lips (Isaiah 6:5).

6. Moses objected not just once, but five times. **Read through Exodus 3:11—4:17** and note his five objections.

Moses' Identity Is Sharpened

Given what we know of Moses' personal history, his first objection is precisely what we would expect. In Exodus 3:11, Moses says to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" We first heard a question about

Moses' authority when the Hebrew slave asked, "Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?" (Exodus 2:14). Now Moses voices it himself.

Prior to the burning bush, Moses' identity is unclear, his purpose clouded. We have known ever since his rescue from the Nile that Moses was destined for this task, but Moses himself does not know. His identity has been based on political power, accidental circumstance, personal compassion, or his experience as a stranger.

God's response to Moses' first objection roots Moses' identity firmly in the continuing presence of the Lord. In Exodus 3:12, God says, "I will be with you; and this will be a sign for you that it is I who sent you." Moses knows who he is because God tells him that his identity is to be grounded in this promise: I will be with you.

7. Think about God's promise "I will be with you." Has God promised to be with all of us? Where else have you heard this promise?

The Name of the LORD

The story of Moses' call continues in the next two chapters. God responds to each of Moses' objections. The most interesting response comes to Moses' next question in Exodus 3:13. Notice that Moses does not, himself, ask for God's name. Rather Moses asks about what he should say if the *Israelites* should ask for God's name. Moses wants to know how he can complete his given task. Moses is concerned about the effectiveness of his mission.

God answers Moses' question by revealing the divine name, *YHWH*, often pronounced "Yahweh." Following the practice of ancient Judaism and the early church, this holy name is not spoken aloud but rather is read as "LORD." In English translations it is always written in capital letters. Interestingly, Christians have tied the sacred name for God to a title for Jesus—the Lord Jesus.

8. Why would the Israelites have wanted to know God's name? Do we think of God as having a name? Why do we pray in the name of Jesus?

Unlike the neat way Moses' name clarifies part of his identity, the divine name is cloaked in all manner of mystery. Despite centuries of inquiry and oceans of spilled ink, scholars cannot say for certain what the divine name means, nor even how it is best translated. In Exodus 3:14, God introduces the name with a phrase that might be translated in any of these ways: "I AM WHO I AM," "I will be who I will be," "I will cause to be what I will cause to be," "I will be who I am," or "I am who I will be."

Still, the heart of the revelation does not come from understanding the best translation. Rather, the true meaning of God's name is revealed through the context in which the name is given. Moses has a job to do, a job given by God. The name is given for the sake of that job, for the sake of God's mission to free the enslaved Hebrews. In giving the name, God gives an assurance and a promise to Moses and to his people. God is inviting us to "put your trust in me, for I will stand behind you and with you." Through the gift of the name, God promises divine deliverance (see Exodus 3:17).

God's Responses

In chapter 4, God responds to each of Moses' last three objections. In verses 2-9, we read about Moses' continued concern for the effectiveness of his mission. In response, God grants Moses the capacity to perform miraculous signs: first with a rod, next with his hand, and then by turning the Nile's water into blood. In each case the power is given precisely so that the Israelites believe Moses is the agent of the LORD and that they should, therefore, follow him.

In this sense, these miraculous signs are akin to Jesus' miracles. In the Gospels, miracles are also performed by God's Called One in order that the people might believe (for examples, see Mark 5:34, 36 and Luke 16:31).

Another way to understand the deeper meaning of these signs is to see how they foreshadow the plagues to come. They are a warning of God's power.

As the story continues, Moses' objections become more and more personal. God finally loses patience with Moses' apparent lack of faith in God's capacity to overcome obstacles. God reminds Moses that the very one who created mouths and gives speech certainly is not hampered by Moses' speech impediment (Exodus 4:11).

Moses' concern about his speech was shaped by his culture. Eloquent speech was so highly valued in Egypt that Pharaoh even had special officials to serve as "mouths" for him. Notice that God does not "solve" Moses' problem; rather, once again, God uses an imperfect Moses to accomplish the divine purpose. In the midst of God's impatience, God points to Aaron, Moses'

brother, in order that Moses might also have a “mouth” (Exodus 4:16).

Transition Story

In Exodus 4:18-26, Moses returns to the home of his father-in-law, collects his family, and begins his journey back to Egypt. This journey is interrupted by one of the more bizarre and disturbing encounters in Scripture in which God attacks Moses (or his son; the text is ambiguous). Moses is saved by his wife Zipporah, who intervenes by circumcising their son.

Passages that provide transitions, like this one, are among the most mysterious in the Bible (see, for instance, Genesis 32:22-32). They reveal how distant we are from the times in which Scripture was written. No interpretations of this passage are entirely satisfactory, and no explanation can ease our discomfort. God apparently turned against the very one who had been chosen.

We can only note once again a foreshadowing of what is to come. Just before this passage, in Exodus 4:22-23, God speaks of the death of Pharaoh's firstborn son as punishment for the captivity of God's firstborn son, Israel. With this circumcision, blood becomes a sign of God's tie to Israel. It will be used again in the final plague, where blood on the doors of Israel's homes protects the Israelites from the angel of death. Also note that once again, in these final verses before Moses' encounter with Pharaoh, Moses is saved by a woman's (Zipporah's) ingenuity and faith.

The People Believe

In Exodus 4:27-31, Aaron, the mouth of Moses, speaks to the Israelites. He tells them all that the LORD has said and performs signs on behalf of his brother. The people respond by believing, bowing down, and worshiping. After all of Moses' concern, the people of Israel respond in faith to the One who has seen their misery and heard their prayers.

9. Imagine yourselves among the Israelites enslaved in Egypt when Moses and Aaron returned. How might you have responded?

Looking Ahead

The drama of the longer tale of Exodus is yet to come. Moses and the Israelites have yet to meet Pharaoh face-to-face. In Session 5 we will explore the various threads of the 10 plagues and talk about the royal battle between Pharaoh and the LORD. **GCA**

The Tetragrammaton

God's name *YHWH*, revealed in the burning bush, was considered to be so sacred, to be so revered, that no one ever actually could say

it aloud. In order to ensure that the name is never spoken, it is represented by just the four consonants without the vowels. The name is therefore called the *tetragrammaton*, which is Latin for "four (*tetra*) letters (*gramma*)."

By the third century B.C., every time the name of God appeared in a text, the Jewish community would say "*adonai*," which means "Lord," rather than saying "*Yahweh*." This practice was continued by the early church. When you read your Bible, every time you see "Lord" with a capital "L" followed by three small letters "ord," the text has "*adonai*," that word which means "lord" or "master." But when you see "LORD" with the "ORD" in small caps, the text reads or means "*YHWH*." And then you are invited to think, "Here I am saying the holy name of God. This is the very God who was revealed to our Hebrew ancestors, who brought the people out of Egypt, through the seas and to the mountain. And this is the very One who sent us Jesus, incarnate Lord and Savior. Blessed be God, and blessed be God's holy name!"

—DLJ

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About the Author

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The Bush That Burned

Glennady Sculley

“ I know you’ve read my story—well, not mine exactly, but the story that talks about me. I burned, but I didn’t burn up. I don’t understand it, either.

One day, I was in the sunshine, soaking up all that God provided for me to stay alive. Moses was not far away, tending the sheep. All of a sudden, I was on fire! Usually when that happens to a bush, it doesn’t take long for everything to burn up, but not me, not this time! I was blazing with light, but my leaves and branches were just fine.

And the angel of God appeared, right out of the fire. Then we heard the voice of God. Oh, I know God used me to get Moses’ attention. But I experienced God’s presence in my very branches, down to my smallest twiglet, down through my roots. I can’t explain it. It was incredible.

I trembled in the breeze, knowing that what was happening to both of us was holy. God told barefoot Moses what to do, and eventually Moses agreed. I, ablaze with God’s holy fire, only could listen and be amazed.

After those moments, suspended in time, lived only in the sense of God’s overwhelming power and mystery, I knew I would no longer

be what I had been. Usually, I was simply there, just spreading my greenery as far as I could. I’d always sensed, as living things do, God’s provision for my living, the rich care for all that God has created and called good. But this day was different. On this day, God made me into something else.

No longer was I just a bush. I was still a bush, to be sure, but a bush that had been on fire with the very presence of God, a bush inhabited for a time by God’s angel. I’m a living, inanimate object that God used to change the direction of one man’s life, and you know the story of what happened with that man.

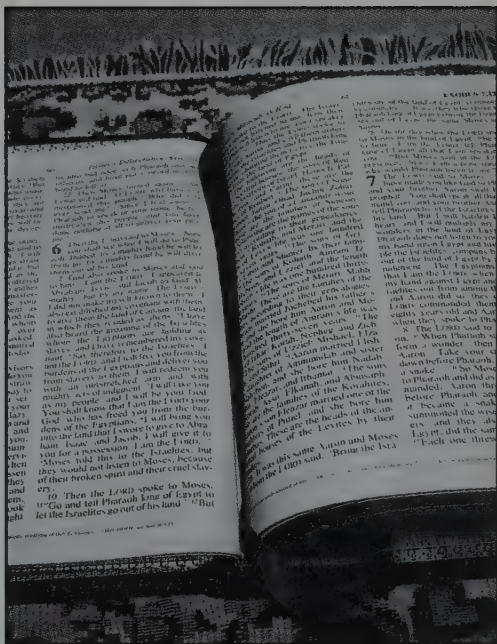
Why, just think, thousands of years later, you also know the story of how God remade me. I know you could say I had no choice, that the fire burned in me without my consent. But how could I not have been willing to be God’s sign to Moses?

If God can remake a bush into all that, what will God do with you? ”

Glennady Sculley, associate director of the Department for Synodical Relations at the ELCA, is a part-time student at Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.

How Is the Bible Like the Sunday Paper?

Terence E. Fretheim



The Sunday paper contains various types of literature: news reports, editorials, feature articles, advice columns, comics, perhaps even a recipe or two. As you move from one type to another, you unconsciously adjust how you read. For example, you read a news report differently than an editorial or a movie review.

In fact, you probably know the sections of the paper so well that you can say something about the contents of each before you begin. Our knowledge of the kinds of literature in a newspaper increases our understanding.

We often forget that the Bible also consists of different types of lit-

erature. Learning to recognize these differences will help us better read and understand the Bible.

The two basic types of literature in the Bible are poetry and prose. You usually can tell the difference by the way in which the type is set up on the page. For example, look at the book of Job. The first two chapters are prose, chapter 3 begins a long section of poetry that continues through chapter 42, verse 6, after which the book concludes with prose.

The book of Psalms is poetry; most of the book of Exodus is prose (but note chapter 15). The Gospel of Luke is mostly prose but has some poetry, especially in chapters 1 through 4.

Having noted this basic difference between prose and poetry, you can then make further distinctions within each category.

Prose

The Bible contains various types of prose; among them are prayers (Genesis 32:9-12), letters (Galatians), parables (Luke 15), miracle stories (Mark 2:1-12), laws (Exodus 21), confessions of faith (Deuteronomy 26:5-9), and genealogies (Genesis 5).

Poetry

The Bible also contains various types of poetry, such as psalms, proverbs, songs (1 Samuel 2:1-10; Luke 1:46-55), blessings (Deuteronomy 33), benedictions (Numbers 6:22-26), and prophetic oracles (Hosea 11). Some of these types of poetry can be subdivided. For example, there are various types of psalms, such as hymns of praise (Psalm 100), songs of thanksgiving (Psalm 30), individual laments (Psalm 22), and community laments (Psalm 44).

One basic question to ask when reading the Bible is: What type of literature am I reading? The answer will often influence how you read.

Sometimes the Bible will identify the type of literature. For example, Jesus tells us in Luke 15:3 that what follows is a parable, the parable of the lost sheep. Sometimes, however, the Bible leaves it up to the reader to identify the literary type. For example, the parables in Luke 15:8-10, Luke 15:11-32, and 2 Samuel 12:1-6 are not named as such. We recognize these texts as parables from knowing other examples of parables.

Remember that all types of literature can be used to speak the truth. So even though parables are a type of fictional literature, they are profoundly true.

Sometimes when a Bible passage does not tell us the literary type, it is difficult to identify what it is, and Bible readers will not always agree. For example, how would you identify the story about the trees in Judges 9:8-15? Some readers would say it is a parable. Others, noting that the chief characters of the story are trees, would call it a fable. In either case, the passage speaks the truth, even though we know the trees did not actually talk with one another!

Sometimes identifying a passage gets even trickier. Take Isaiah 5:1-7. Verse 1 says that what follows is a love song. But the prophet here seems to be telling a parable of judgment, much like the parable of judgment Nathan tells to David when Nathan subtly indicts David for his actions with Bathsheba (see 2 Samuel 12:1-12). Verse 7 tells us the vineyard is not really a vineyard but the people of Israel. This means that the beloved who is the owner of the vineyard is actually God. The grapes that God expected are justice or righteousness, and the wild grapes that grew are bloodshed or the cry of people. Perhaps this passage is called a love song to entice the listener or reader to listen carefully.

Often you can identify the literary types in the Bible by repeated words or phrases, or by the outlines they follow. We will take a look at this next month. **G**

The Rev. Terence E. Fretheim is professor of Old Testament at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Happy Birthday, ELCA

Marcia Erickson Bates

Birthdays are a time to look in the mirror and reflect on who we are, where we've been, and where we're going. As the ELCA prepares to celebrate its 10th anniversary as a church body, it's a good time to ask ourselves these same questions.

I've asked about 20 ELCA members to reflect on our church's identity. Of the 20, half are laypeople, half are clergy. About half are women and half are men. Half are from the Pacific Northwest, the rest from elsewhere. Here's what they had to say.

Who are we?

For many respondents, the ELCA's identity is found in its understanding of God's grace. Several stressed society's need for this message of grace. "We are the church for the 21st century," says Carlos Paiva, pastor of Iglesia Luterana Angelica in Los Angeles. "We are in a very good, important time to continue to share the message of grace in our commu-



A weaving of strips from ELCA congregations is on display at the Lutheran Center in Chicago.

nities—regardless what kind of language, regardless what kind of color, regardless what kind of social situation.”

Despite the potentially broad appeal of our message, a number of people identified the ELCA as a homogeneous church, primarily white and middle class. Some considered how ELCA members are rediscovering their identity as they grapple with ways to reach out. "In the past, we haven't necessarily had to try to figure out who we are in relation to the various other people in this country and around the world," says Nancy Maeker, dean of

students at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. "Now, because of some decline in growth, we are forced to do that. And I think God can work through that."

What unites us?

The Gospel and a commitment to proclaim it were named as the primary forces uniting ELCA members. While several people mentioned liturgical worship as a uniting force, they also saw congregations experimenting with a variety of worship forms.

"I think there is a greater understanding of what Luther means or what the Augsburg Confession says about what is essential: 'that the Word be preached and the sacraments administered,'" says Jim Moy, assistant to the bishop in the Northwest Washington Synod. "I think there's a better sense of what Lutherans around the world have known all along in terms of their theological and cultural identities."

What threatens to divide us?

The greatest challenge to our unity was seen in our tendency to seek our commonality outside the Gospel. Culture, language, and social issues all were identified as factors that are not divisive in and of themselves, but that could threaten to divide us if we insist on uniformity. "We're too quick to make those issues the whole of who we are, rather than realizing that we're still centered in Christ, empowered to be the people of God," says Laurie Natwick, pastor at Sharon Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, North Dakota.

Those mentioning social issues felt the church can thrive even as its

members embrace a variety of viewpoints. They hoped the church would wrestle with such issues but not demand agreement.

What are our strengths?

The most frequently mentioned strength of the ELCA is its people, including its leaders. "I served four years on synod council, and I was just amazed by both the lay and clergy involvement, the wisdom and faith that these people bring to the church as a whole," says Barb Smith, preschool director and member of Holy Spirit Lutheran Church in Kirkland, Washington.

People in every corner of society need the hope the church has to give.

Diversity also was identified as a strength. "The church is not just Chicago, it's not just Texas, it's not just Alaska. It's all those things together," says Gordon Straw, a doctoral student and part-time director of Native American Ministries at the ELCA in Chicago. "Any one part that's in crisis does not destroy the whole thing because it's not built on a mechanical structure, it's built in an organic body."

What are our weaknesses?

Areas identified as weaknesses could be grouped by the way we approach differences, change, and the future. We may tend to see differences as

negative because our congregations and communities have tended to be homogeneous, says Jackie Brolsma, a member of Central Lutheran Church in Seattle. "We just don't have any real good experience with how to be tolerant and how to deal with difference, even conflict. Difference is seen as scary or threatening, rather than adventuresome or life changing."

Another weakness—insecurity about our Lutheran tradition—can lead us to follow fads in an effort to be relevant. This tendency is particularly prevalent in worship, according to Dan Erlander, author and pastor at Trinity Lutheran Church in Freeland, Washington. "I think there is a certain fear that somehow being Lutheran isn't going to work, isn't going to be attractive," he says.

We must find a balance between chasing fads and locking ourselves into traditional worship forms, says Gordon Straw. "We arbitrarily pick a place and a time and make that eternal, and then we become irrelevant."

How are we different from our predecessors?

Size was the primary difference respondents saw between the ELCA and its predecessors. For most, former church-body affiliation held little meaning. A few admitted they couldn't recall to which earlier body their congregation previously had belonged. Joan Hunt, pastor at Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Portland, Oregon, compares the

merger to a marriage. "You've got strong individuals, but the relationship grows as it goes along, and finally you've got an unrepeatable unit in society, a family that couldn't

For many, the ELCA's identity is found in its understanding of God's grace.

go back to being who they were because of their commitments and experiences together."

Several people said they are glad to be part of a church beyond their local congregations. Ann Seitz-Brown, associate in ministry at Bergstrasse Lutheran Church, Ephrata, Pennsylvania, and member of the board of the ELCA's Division for Congregational Ministries, recently felt the power of the broader church in a very personal way. "I was pretty down. And I got a letter from the board folk. They said, 'We wanted to let you know that we prayed for you today.' I think that's a strength. That although there's hierarchy and although there's bureaucracy, there's also a connectedness."

Have we fulfilled expectations?

Most people felt that the ELCA hasn't lived up to the many expectations set for it.

Several spoke of the goal that

within the first 10 years of its existence, 10 percent of ELCA membership would be people of color and/or those whose primary language was other than English. "Most of the hopes and dreams [related to the 10 percent goal] were translated into the multicultural mission strategy," says Moy. "But that was developed in Chicago, and I think that was a mistake. [The strategy] needs to be translated locally, and each synod locally needs to be challenged."

Several people acknowledged that the first years of the ELCA have not been easy. "I think that there was more mistrust than we ever thought there would be, and that it was harder to come together than we ever thought it would be," says Maecker. "Part of that is just the cycle of death and resurrection, in which some things had to die. And maybe, just maybe, we're into the resurrection stage now."

What are your fears for the ELCA?

A number of respondents expressed the concern that resistance to change or the fear of conflict will keep our congregations from engaging in mission. "My only fear is that we might avoid addressing some of the important issues facing society for fear of hurting the church," says Mark Knutson, pastor at Augustana Lutheran Church in Portland, Oregon.

Others voiced the fear that a combination of factors will cause the ELCA to lose the next generation. "My fear is that the church wouldn't

address why all these people are not being connected," says Gayle Bintliff, member of First Lutheran Church in Williston, North Dakota.

What are your hopes?

The primary hope that people expressed is for the ELCA and its congregations to reach out to the "unchurched." Seitz-Brown stresses that evangelism is important even in areas like hers. "Lancaster is a very 'churched' area, and yet there are a lot of people who really don't know about God's love," she says. "My hope is that the church still might be able to proclaim in a way that people can hear today."

People in every corner of society need the hope the church has to give, says Paiva. He discovered this in the aftermath of the 1992 unrest in Los Angeles. "After the riot, people started to come to church," he says. "My hope is that every single church, regardless of what kind of social component they have around their own churches, will be open to receive all of these people who are coming back."

Many said they hoped that, in addition to evangelizing, the church will minister to those who are hurting. "There are people who are in bondage in a lot of ways," says Maecker. "We have some real gifts to offer across the board, both in an individual location and in a global context. That's my hope—that we will be bold enough and trust God enough to give of ourselves." **CG**

Marcia Erickson Bates served eight years at the ELCA churchwide office and now is a freelance writer on the ELCA's Northwest Washington Synod Communication Committee.

Brief Prayers on News Items

Sonia C. Solomonson

Your daily prayer list

What news stories caught your attention in the past few days? You can do something about those people and concerns: Add them to your prayer list. You might pray for:

- refugees and displaced people.
- those who are only one paycheck away from homelessness.
- youth and adult leaders who are trying to make a difference in their communities.

Kenyan theologian issues challenges

"Both men and women are like the two wings of a bird," Kenyan Lutheran theologian Musimbi Kanyoro said at a pan-African conference of African women theologians in Nairobi, Kenya. "Both are needed to be able to fly," she said. Kanyoro challenged men in Africa's churches to take their place beside women in transforming societies according to God's power instead of men's power. She noted the tendency to refer to some issues as women's issues, thus assigning them little or no relevance.

Guide us as men and women striving toward true partnership, Creator God.

Lutherans creatively pay off a mortgage

Members of Our Savior Lutheran Church, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, sold tickets for an epic train trip to pay off their mortgage. The "Train Campaign" began in 1993. Members bought tickets for an imaginary trip from Baton Rouge to the Lutheran Center in Chicago by making an annual pledge. One month alone drew almost \$12,000 in pledges. The church's social hall sports a map that illustrates the train's progress. Last year, each pledge bought an individually designed train car for the map.

Keep us from checking our imaginations at the church door; O God.

Church agencies fight exploitation

Last year delegates from more than 130 countries gathered in Sweden for the first World Congress Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children. Church aid agencies joined government delegations and non-governmental organizations to draw attention to the problem and discuss first steps in fighting the flourishing sex tourism, especially in Asian countries, and the booming market for child pornography.

Fill us with passion, O Jesus, to stand up for all the world's children.

Sonia C. Solomonson is a senior editor for The Lutheran.

How I Celebrate Easter



n Thursday evening before Easter, Marion called to ask if I would help with the altar preparations. "Everybody's coming down with the flu," she said in frustration. I agreed to help.

Sunrise service was at 6:00 A.M. I arrived at 5:00 A.M. to prepare for the three services. As I drove to the church, I thought of Mary and the others as they quietly hurried down the road toward the grave on that first Easter morning. Despite their feelings of grief they were taking care of things. Doing what needed to be done.

As I turned the key in the church door in the dark, I was almost overwhelmed by the wonderful aroma of lilies. By the glow of the eternal candle I saw the empty cross surrounded by lilies, and experienced the utter emptiness of the sanctuary and the entire church building. Was that the feeling those women had when they reached the tomb? No, they expected to find Jesus' body there. I did not. I know Christ is risen. He is risen indeed!

*"Charlie" Schapfel
Hixton, Wisconsin*

I celebrate Easter as a jubilant threefold amen. The somberness of Lent and Holy Week prepares me for the joy of Easter morning. Midweek and Sunday worship services call me to remember Christ's suffering and death for my brokenness with God. The realization of my sinful nature—and what God has done to correct it—is my first amen of celebration.

My second amen is Easter Sunday. It is a day I share with church and family members. The church is filled with flowers, and the cross is covered with lilies. Easter hymns and liturgy fill the nave.

At the close of the worship service, we leave the church

carrying yellow "Christ Is Risen" balloons. Family and friends gather at my home for dinner. Easter Sunday is, from beginning to end, a joyous celebration of God's astonishing love.

My third amen brings the joy of the resurrection, and the celebration of it, to my heart and mind every Sunday of the year. Each Sunday brings me to the mouth of the empty tomb. I leave worship to "go and tell" what I have heard and seen and felt. Every Sunday is Easter Sunday. Amen!

Jeanne Philbrick

Hastings-on-Hudson, New York

"Get up early in the morning and you will see the sun shout." As a little girl these were the words my mother would say to us—my nine siblings and me—while preparing for bed the night before Easter.

Mom told us that on that glorious first Easter, at dawn, when the stone was rolled away, there was such joy in creation that the sun literally danced as it rose in the sky. It didn't just rise, it bounced from side to side—"shouting," if you will.

Many years have passed since those days of my childhood, yet I still rise early on Easter morning to try to catch the shouting sun. I might not have witnessed the shouting sun in the sky, but I do continue to witness the shouting sun (Son!) in my heart and in my life.

Doris J. Williams

St. Louis, Missouri

On Easter Sunday 1996, I was a patient at the special care pregnancy unit at Methodist Hospital in Rochester, Minnesota. I was on bed rest for the last trimester of my pregnancy. Easter morning came and was greeted with hospital routine. Nothing was special for that day. I lay in bed feeling alone, when the phone rang. A friend greeted me saying, "Happy Easter, Annette! You are my symbol of Easter today. For within you, you carry a new life, a blessing from God."

I felt so renewed! Yes, it was Easter and it took on a whole new meaning. I reached for my Bible and read the Easter story. I thought of the words of my friend. The new life I was carrying was a symbol of Easter. Christ was bringing to fruition this miracle he had worked in me. My husband and I celebrated and gave thanks when our healthy daughter was born on May 31, 1996.

So, how do I celebrate Easter? Every day when I hold my daughter, I celebrate this new life God has given to me. I celebrate Easter through my new outlook on life: I see all children as special gifts, I realize how precious life is, I appreciate more fully the love of family and friends, my faith and prayer life have deepened, and I know what it means to live by the grace of God.

This year I'll be able to attend an Easter service to celebrate our risen Lord. I can tell my daughter the Easter story for the first time. As I hold her, I will be reminded of my friend's words and I will say to her, "Happy Easter, Meredith! You are my symbol of Easter today. For you are a new life, a blessing from God."

*Annette Jenkins
Winnebago, Minnesota*

As a senior citizen living in southern California, I usually wake on Easter morn to a gloriously bright and sunny day. I begin the morning with a prayer of joy and thanksgiving for my children and grandchildren living in faraway places, who will call me today. Then I eat breakfast with my husband, Gaylord. Breakfast features hot-cross buns that I have baked during Holy Week and shared with neighbors on our block.

Donning our Sunday best, we arrive early at St. Andrew's Lutheran Church in Van Nuys. The service begins outdoors. In the center of the lawn is a large wooden cross bedecked with flowers and greenery—plants from the homes and gardens of parishioners.

Congregants and visitors gather in a semicircle before the cross. All recite a litany led by our pastor, praising the Lord on this day of resurrection.

From there we process into the sanctuary, each holding a stringed balloon. At the signal we all release our balloons, and they float up to the high-vaulted ceiling. With the blaring trumpets, exultant choir voices, and organ accompaniment, I join heartily in the singing of "Jesus Christ Is Risen Today."

When we return home, I prepare and serve dinner for ourselves and our guest, a widowed neighbor. Later that afternoon the phone rings, and I answer it. I hear the hoped-for words: "Happy Easter, Grandma!"

*Virginia Hendrickson
Van Nuys, California*

Upcoming reader calls

◆ "Today's Golden Calf" (Where do you see idolatry today?) will be featured in the November LWT. Due July 1.

◆ "How I Will Celebrate Christmas" is slated for the December LWT. Due August 1.

Send your essay of 350 words or less to LWT reader call, 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631. Essayists excerpted in the magazine will receive a year's subscription to LWT to keep or give as a gift.

◆◆ Giving our lives joyfully

'This Is My Way of Responding'

"Today I give thanks to God for the gift of gravity." That's the message you're likely to hear on the answering machine of Bea Carlson, an appreciator of all God's good gifts, great and small. Bea is a 75-year resident of Loves Park, Illinois.

Bea and I met at the 1993 Women of the ELCA Triennial Convention in Washington, D.C. She was eager to learn about establishing an endowment fund for her church, Emmanuel Lutheran. (An endowment fund is an "account" that preserves the gift principal and uses only the yearly interest income to support ministry.)

Since then, Bea and I have visited numerous times. She now has established her own endowment fund to provide for herself and her husband, Willard; Emmanuel Church; and Women of the ELCA.

Understanding charitable trusts and the various charitable means that can reduce estate taxes is a process. Bea and Willard play an ongoing game of who can make the most from their investments. Neither reveals who is winning, but Bea likens her investing to Jesus' directive to increase our God-given resources as taught in his parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30).

A woman who delights in her Swedish heritage, Bea has filled her home, which was also her parents' home, with reminders of the old



Bea Carlson and her grandchildren.

country. Knowing the importance of roots, she spends hours with her grandchildren, passing on Swedish traditions she learned as a child.

Bea's life has revolved around Willard, her children and grandchildren, and the church. And she reaches outside her environment with a concern that today's problems may weigh heavily on the children of tomorrow.

Knowing how much she has been blessed, Bea put her concerns for future generations into action. Her endowment fund ultimately will benefit untold numbers of people, especially women and children living in crisis. Its creation sets an example for her grandchildren.

"When I consider that more than half the world lives in abject poverty and how much the Lord has blessed me," she explains, "making plans for an endowment fund that will keep on giving forever made a lot of sense to me. This is my way of responding."

Pat Bilow

Director for Planned Giving

To schedule a planned giving workshop, call 800-638-3522, ext. 2726, or 419-592-2902.

'Welcome to Katie's Table'

Ten years ago I was in Wittenburg, Germany, with 15 other Lutheran women. We visited the Lutherhaus and the old Black Cloister, and stood in awe around the table where Martin Luther held his table talks.

I don't remember seeing any table that belonged to Martin's wife, Katherine Von Bora Luther. At the time, it didn't occur to me to seek one out. Now I wonder, "Where was the table on which Katie kneaded bread dough, balanced the financial books of the household, wrote her letters, shared conversation with friends, made decisions, had her own theological discussions?"

That unheralded table is a focus of attention as the Women of the ELCA's tenth anniversary is being planned. Katie's Table has become a symbol as staff and executive board think about the tables in our lives and in the lives of other women: kitchen tables, boardroom tables, drafting tables, tables of contents, altars. Suddenly I find myself paying closer attention to the quirky little antique table in my kitchen. I am more aware of the items I place on my tables and what they say about my priorities. Most importantly, I am paying closer attention to those who sit at my table, the conversations around it, and the decisions made across it.

Who are those who gather around the tables in the church-wide office? If our tables could talk, what would they tell you?

Foremost, you would know that our table talk revolves primarily around you—the incredible diversity of women in the church and the joys and challenges of your faith lives. We work continually to develop resources and programs to support you as you "engage in ministry and action." As we work, we frequently invite you to join us at the table so that we can hear directly your needs and dreams.



This past year, some of you may have been part of consultations on leadership development, theological conferences, or triennial convention planning. The 64 synodical presidents gathered in February and the new synodical treasurers will meet this month, as will synodical affirmative action coordinators. The churchwide executive board meets twice a year to provide vision and direction.

As we talk about the complex, painful issues confronting women and children in crisis, especially those living in poverty, we wrestle and we pray. We celebrate because your gifts help provide grants and scholarships to empower women and their families.

Our table was richly blessed by the presence of Agaliece Miller as bridge interim director from August 1 to October 1, 1996. What a saint! Agaliece served for 43 years in various positions at the Illinois Department of Labor, ultimately serving as director of the Illinois Department of Employment Security, a governor's cabinet position with more than 5,600 employees and a budget of \$159 million. She was the first woman and the first African American to hold a state cabinet position. She retired from that position in 1983. Agaliece came out of retirement to help begin the new churchwide offices of the ELCA, serving as assistant director of the human resources department. Women of the ELCA benefited in countless ways from Agaliece's wisdom, experience, humor, graciousness, and abiding faith. We were deeply grieved by her death in November 1996 and continue to thank God for her all-too-brief time with us.

Earlier this year, we marked the arrival of several new staff members. Valora Starr returned to the staff as director of evangelism and stewardship education. Inez Torres Davis joined us as director of cross-cultural programming. Barbara Tollefson and Gwen Carr will share a contract staff position working with organizational development.

The three mission areas of growth, community, and action remain central in all we do. On staff, however, we found that by dividing ourselves into three teams based on those mission areas we missed opportunities to communicate and work more closely with one another. The staff has restructured into one team, following the philosophy "Three Mission Areas—One Mission." Doris Strieter is serving as interim associate director and is coordinating the new staff structure. Our emphasis is to provide consistent communication and support for mission area networks in synodical organizations.

The conversations, ideas, celebrations, decisions, and work continue to surround our tables as they do yours. Welcome to Katie's Table!

*Terry L. Bowes
Interim Executive Director
Women of the ELCA*

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